

House Republican Press Release

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Rep. Ward Says Williams Must Strip Newton Of Leadership Post Cites Plea In Bribery Case



HARTFORD – House Leader Rep. Robert M. Ward today called upon the Senate President to strip embattled Democratic state Sen. Ernest Newton of his leadership post following a bribery plea in Bridgeport federal court that is linked to the on-going investigation of the Bridgeport lawmaker.

Ward, of North Branford, said Senate President Pro Tempore Donald Williams' virtual silence to date on the potential scandal amounts to support for Newton, the third highest ranking member of the Democratic controlled chamber.

"It is incredible to me that a senior ranking member of the Democratic Senate leadership team who is the clear subject of major federal corruption investigation continues to serve in the capacity of leader," Ward said. "Senator Newtown has had his legislative office raided, the legislature has been served with a subpoena and he has had his personal telephone tapped for six months. And today we have a bribery plea entered in federal court. Senator Williams, this is your top deputy - what are you thinking?"

The head of a non-profit job training agency admitted he paid a \$5,000 bribe to a legislator to secure a \$100,000 state grant. Newton is not named in court documents but prosecutors cited a press release from Newton's office announcing the grant in 2004.

This spring news reports cited federal sources and documents that indicate an estimated 7,000 telephone calls Newton made over a six-month period last year were tapped by federal investigators, and that nearly 400 were deemed "incriminating." Investigators are questioning whether Newton or members of his family improperly received state money, are looking into loans he received and are scrutinizing his work at a state-funded non-profit agency, and at a Bridgeport sewage treatment plant.

Ward said that Newton's refusal to answer any questions about his outside employment and what he did for the non-profit agency was also troubling, and that he should disclose his financial arrangements. "Answer the public, explain your duties," Ward said.

Ward said, "Apparently, Senator Williams is not overly concerned about the activities of his top deputy or he would have already removed him, at least temporarily."

Ward said the extraordinary wiretap reports and the bribery plea place Newton clearly in the middle of the investigation. He added that the state has spent thousands on outside legal services in responding to the broad subpoena that was served earlier this year on the office of Legislative Management.

In January, two months after they expired, federal investigators raided Newtown's Capitol offices and those of two state-funded agencies. One agency was run by Newton's sister.

